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Get Wild: The history of names — Eagles Nest Wilderness

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Get Wild



The Gore Range, home to Eagles Nest Wilderness, is pictured on Saturday, June 10, 2023.

Andrew Maciejewski/Summit Daily News

Our beautiful Eagles Nest Wilderness was established as a Wilderness Area by Congress in 1975.

However, the history of the name of the Eagles Nest's central mountain range — currently known known as the Gore Range — is wrapped in confusion. Before the U.S. Geological Service and Board of Geographic Names began providing oversight for geographic names, explorers and others took it upon themselves to attribute names to mountains, rivers and other geographic features, and then sharing these names on hand-drawn maps. The U.S. Geological Service was established in 1879 before the Board of Geographic Names was created in 1890.

In August 1868, John Wesley Powell and William Byers, the publisher of Rocky Mt. News, were members of a party that completed the first non-indigenous ascent of Long's Peak. The first known published reference to the "Gore's Range" was in the Sept. 1, 1868 edition of Rocky Mt. News. It had an article written by Byers that says they could see a number of mountain ranges from the summit of Long's, including "Gore's Range." That same summer, Powell made the first ascent of Mt. Powell, which was then named after him in today's Gore Range. This ascent was not long before his famous trip down the Grand Canyon in 1869.

In 1876, the General Land Office's Colorado territory map shows no Gore references. The 1879 Rand McNally Colorado map shows a Gore Range north of Kremmling, and an 1881 U.S. Geological Service map based on Hayden's 1873-76 surveys shows Gore's mountains. Another annual report based on the Hayden Survey in 1873 shows references to the Blue River Range, which included Mt. Powell and

the Park Range north of Kremmling. The next annual report based on Hayden's 1874 Survey references the Blue River Range, the Snowy Range and the Park Range.

Are you confused yet?

George Gore, an Irish baronet and notorious hunter, never stepped foot into our Summit County "Gore Range." While traveling in the 1850s on his killing sprees through Colorado and Wyoming, he shot thousands of buffalo, elk, deer and other wildlife, and leaving them to waste, while local indigenous people depended on these animals for survival. His actions are the opposite of our stewardship values today, and all those who helped guide him on his hunting journey were disgusted by his wastefulness, including Native Americans, mountain men, and the U.S. Calvary at the end of his trip.

Today, we have our Colorado State Board of Geographic Names is reviewing name change suggestions, after which their proposals go up to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names for final consideration. Inappropriate names have been slowly changing in order to reflect our values in the board's carefully crafted naming criteria. Naming a feature after a person requires that the person has resided in the community and contributed to the community's betterment. For instance, Mt. Evans was officially changed to Mt. Blue Sky September 2023, honoring the Cheyenne and Arapaho people. John Evans was Colorado's second territorial governor who set in motion the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 that killed at least 230 Cheyenne and Arapaho people, mostly women, elders and children.

The proposal to change the Gore Range to the Nuchu Range is to honor the Ute people (Nuchu) who lived in this area for thousands of years before being forcibly removed to reservations following the Ute Removal Act that denied the Ute the 12 million acres of land that had formally been guaranteed to them in perpetuity. Current Ute tribal representatives have approved this name change.

Our beautiful Eagles Nest Wilderness is enjoyed by most of us daily, skiing or hiking into the area, or even just looking at the peaks. The name Gore is the antithesis of our shared values and adoration of these precious lands.

"Get Wild" publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Karn Stiegelmeier is the immediate past Chair of Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit EagleSummitWilderness.org.

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